

Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar, India, in an undated photo (Photo: CNS/courtesy of the Diocese of Jullundur)

by Catholic News Service

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An Indian bishop, facing court proceedings on charges of raping a nun, tested positive for COVID-19, reported ucanews.com.

Some, however, believe the medical report was used to keep him out of court.

Bishop Franco Mulakkal of Jalandhar "tested positive for COVID-19 as per the medical report" and could be moved "to government facilities, and sanitization of the bishop's house will be done as per the COVID-19 protocols while government officials decide what to do next," the diocesan administrator, Bishop Agnelo Gracias, told ucanews.com July 15.

According to the medial report, Mulakkal tested positive for COVID-19 July 13, hours before a court in southern Kerala canceled his bail application and issued an arrest warrant following his continuous failure to appear before the court.

The bishop's counsel told the court his client failed to appear that day because he was under quarantine, at the request of state officials.

However, ucanews.com reported the medical report has come under suspicion because, even after testing positive, the bishop remained in his house, and no restrictions were imposed on people living in it.

"It seems to be yet another gimmick from Mulakkal to evade arrest," said Riju Kanjookaran, the convener of Save Our Sisters, a lay movement formed to support the rape victim after Catholic Church leadership backed the accused bishop.

"Despite the bishop testing positive, no security mechanism from the government was put in place to stop people visiting. No one residing there was asked to go into quarantine and no sanitization was done," he said.

The bishop is facing trial on rape charges after the former superior of the Missionaries of Jesus, an indigenous diocesan congregation, accused Mulakkal in June 2018 of raping her. The nun alleged the bishop sexually abused her more than 13 times over two years during his visits to Kerala, where the congregation has a

convent.

Kerala police filed a 2,000-page charge sheet against Mulakkal in April 2019.

Although Mulakkal continues to live in the Jalandhar bishop's house, in 2018 the Vatican appointed Bishop Gracias as apostolic administrator to run the diocese.

The case has 83 witnesses, including Cardinal George Alencherry, major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church.

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